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NEWS RELEASE

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The Nation's Report Card: Improvement in R.I. Mathematics Scores Significant “achievement gaps” separate student groups

The results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 mathematics tests, released today (October 14th, 2009), show that Rhode Island public-school students have improved in both 4th grade and 8th grade.

Rhode Island was one of only five states to improve significantly in both tested grades; the others are the District of Columbia, Nevada, and the two states that have partnered with Rhode Island in the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), New Hampshire and Vermont.

Despite these gains, gaps widened in grade 4 between the scores for all students and the scores for various groups of students, including students with disabilities, students in poverty, English-language learners, and Asian, Black, and Hispanic students. Mathematics scores for Rhode Island Hispanic students were the lowest in the nation in both 4th grade and 8th grade.

“With these NAEP results, the evidence is unmistakable. High standards aligned to our state assessments are moving our students to better performance,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “While our work is by no means over, this report card clearly indicates that our approach to standards and assessments is the right approach. It is not by chance that the few states that saw improvement among both their 4th- and 8th-grade students are our partners in NECAP. While this is positive news, we must continue to press for higher performance, especially among our various groups of students.”

“Although we have more work to do to close our achievement gaps, I am pleased to see that we are making progress in mathematics,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “We have put the foundation in place for continuous improvement, including challenging standards and the rigorous state assessment system that we developed with our NECAP partners. Now, we must work to improve the performance of all of our students and to close the achievement gaps.”

“The NAEP results give us some encouraging signs, but overall we are at about the national average and we know that our students can do better than that,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “Moreover, our achievement gaps are large and they are widening. I am especially concerned that our Hispanic students have the lowest scores in the nation. This shameful statistic makes it clear that we must waste no time in transforming Rhode Island education to prepare all students for success.”

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The results that the National Center for Education Statistic (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education released today show that 39 percent of Rhode Island students scored proficient or higher in grade 4, which is 1 point above the national average and 5 points better than the previous test (in 2007). Among student groups, however, only 18 percent of students in poverty, 15 percent of Black students, 14 percent of Hispanic students, 13 percent of students with disabilities, and 11 percent of English-language learners scored proficient or higher.

In grade 8, 28 percent of Rhode Island students scored proficient or higher, which is 5 points below the national average and unchanged from the previous test. Among Black students, Hispanic students, and English-language learners, only 8 percent scored proficient or higher. Among students with disabilities, only 5 percent scored proficient or higher.

The statewide test scores improved by 3 points in both grades: to 239 in grade 4 (equal to the national average) and to 278 in grade 8 (3 points below the national average). Scores are on a scale of 0-500. Hispanic students were 20 points below the state score in grade 4 and 23 points below the state score in grade 8.

A selected sample of 4th-grade and 8th-grade students (about 5,200) from across the state took the NAEP mathematics and reading tests from January through March of this year. The NCES will release the results of the reading tests in January, 2010. NCES releases statewide results for grades 4 and 8 only; it releases no results at the school or district level.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will post further information on the Rhode Island NAEP scores on the RIDE Web site:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Assessment/default.aspx>

The NCES has posted information about the NAEP mathematics results on its site:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/mathematics/>